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Letter from Taizé

Bimonthly 3.50 FF 6 December 1991 - January 1992

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Reflection on
the Holy Spirit, contd.

IN BUDAPEST
AND IN EUROPE

Common roots

"Songs from Taizé had already crossed the borders. Signs of a communion that formerly was scarcely visible; now they are like common roots that will help us to grow together."

The key geographic situation of Hungary means that events in neighbouring countries have an important impact. The war in Yugoslavia has brought many refugees to the south of the country.

The European meeting will be a sign of hope for many of the inhabitants of Budapest. Allowing us to glimpse the joy of being together beyond our divisions, it will encourage us to take on responsibilities for the building up of Europe.

In Budapest, the visits made to all the parishes of different confessions in the city and its surroundings have shown that the hospitality will be generous. Young people who are part of the groups of preparation are visiting groups in different churches and discovering signs of hope in their neighbourhood–sometimes hidden realities that witness to faithfulness in the commitment to serve others.

The European meeting is being prepared through a rootedness in prayer. In many of the parishes of Budapest there is already a regular prayer, such as the one held Friday nights which, for several years already, has been moving from one parish to another. During the months of preparation, a daily midday prayer is being held in a church in the centre of the city.

The meetings in the parishes are opportunities to discover groups of young adults who are reflecting on the Bible and on their life. They bring to light a great vitality that is shown especially at the baptisms of adults and young people. It is clear that, for decades, Christians have been living out their faith in a radical way and taking risks.

Throughout Europe, groups are getting ready to make the journey to Budapest. Some will come in special trains, others by bus, some of them, like the Portuguese, travelling for three days. In Italy, the parishes of Udine, a town on the road to Hungary, are preparing to welcome all the groups who will pass through with a prayer service and a simple meal.

Everywhere, the preparation is an opportunity for praying together. In Bavaria, for example, in a rural area, a group decided to celebrate a regular prayer in turn in the parish church of five villages:

"The icon of the cross remains in the church for the two weeks preceding the prayer. During this time, at each worship service, children light candles in front of the cross. People have no trouble understanding our idea of a pilgrimage of reconciliation between the five parishes. The first prayer was held in the smallest village, with 150 inhabitants, where many suffer from the lack of parish activities. With joy and astonishment we saw people of all ages come to take part. It's a first step to bring people into contact with one another. This is important between our villages, where divisions are sometimes quite strong."

The Budapest meeting is being held at a time when many, in Europe, are worried about the upheavals and the uncertainties that have followed the social changes in the former totalitarian countries. In these countries, after a period of enthusiasm, it is going to take time to understand each other and to build together. Someone from ex-East Germany writes about his expectations, in this context, concerning the meeting in Budapest:

"It seems essential to me that we soon have this meeting that will bring together young adults from East and West. I notice that there is still so much incomprehension in people's outlooks: it's hard for the inhabitants of the former Eastern bloc countries to have the impression that each country will have to find its own solution by itself.

Something weighs heavily on our daily life: for many people it would be liberating to be able to express, even to just one other person, their errors of the past, their collaboration with an unjust system. That would make a new beginning possible for them. But they are unable to speak. More people than you think feel guilty in this way; we were so imprisoned in fear.

There are also signs of hope: those who carried candles in the streets two years ago, though earlier they were afraid to do anything, are now patiently trying to break up the hard ground, piece by piece. They are hoping to get new courage from the meeting in Hungary; they are looking forward to meeting those who, in their own situations, are doing the same thing.

The prayer services with the songs of Taizé are for us, in both East and West, a kind of common house in which we both feel at home, even without words. These songs already crossed the borders that used to divide us; we sang them in our different countries. They are signs of a communion that formerly was scarcely visible; now they are like common roots that will help us to grow together." ¶

Suggested prayer before going to Budapest

These elements can be used during different prayers in the weeks before the European meeting or for a "prayer of departure."

I.

By the Spirit, we cry out: "Abba, Father!" (Rom 8,15). The Spirit constantly renews in us a deep desire for reconciliation. Reconciliation is an inexhaustible gift of God. It gives us the dignity to which we are called, the dignity of sons and daughters and not of slaves.

Chant
Spiritus Jesu Christi

Prayer
Living God, enable us to turn to you at every moment. By your forgiveness, you come to dispel our faults like the morning mist, and place on our finger the ring of the prodigal son.

Chant
Confitemini

Psalm
I take shelter in you, O Lord, I shall never be put to shame.
You are just, make haste to save me, incline your ear to my prayer.
Into your hands I commend my spirit, for you have saved me, O God.
I will rejoice and be glad, on account of your constant love.
Lord, you saw my distress, you beheld the trouble of my soul;
you saved me from my enemies' hands, your love led me out, set me free.
Always I trust in you, Lord, you see, you are my God.
Take courage and be of good heart, all who hope in the Lord.

Psalm 31

Gospel reading
Jesus said in a parable: "While the son was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran to him, put his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, «Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.» But the father said to the servants, «Quick, bring the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For my son was dead, and he has come back to life; he was lost and is now found!»ö

Luke 15,20-24
(or else read Galatians 4,6-7)

Chant
Bless the Lord

Silence

Litany of reconciliation
- Eternal God, you gather what was scattered: look with love upon the Church of your Son...
- Eternal God, you bring into unity what you have gathered: look upon the human family and give it peace...
- O Christ, Love of the Father, bring life to your Church by the breath of the Spirit...
- O Christ, Risen Lord, make us abound in mutual love...
- O Christ, you set the Church as a sign in the midst of the world: draw all people to your light...
- O Christ, enable us always to find support in the faith of your Church...
- O Christ, you remain close beside us: give us the joy of the Beatitudes and the longing for reconciliation between all the baptized...
- O Christ, make us passionate seekers after trust...

Our Father

Chant
Benedictus

II.

God reconciled us to himself by his son, the Christ, who has become our brother in all things but sin, experiencing even anguish, abandonment and the suffering of the cross. (This prayer can end with the prayer around the cross)

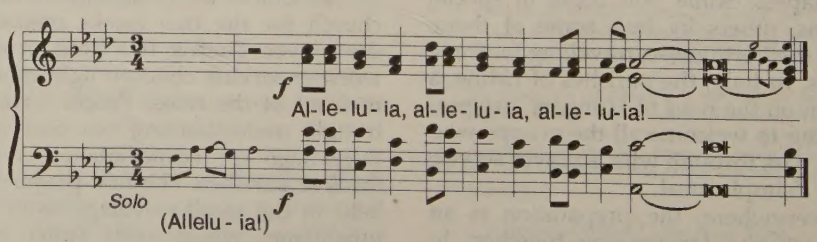
Chant
Bonum est confidere

Prayer
O Christ, show us how to turn to you at every moment. So often we forget that you dwell in us, that you pray in us, that you love in us. Your miracle in us is your trust and your forgiveness, always offered in that unique communion called the Church.

Reading
Christ became like his brothers and sisters in all things... Since he suffered the trial himself, he is able to help those who are undergoing trials.

Hebrews 2,17-18

Litany of compassion
- O Christ, your life was not a triumph, you carried a cross: may we walk alongside you...
- O Christ, you learnt faithfulness in your suffering: you have become a source of everlasting salvation...
- O Christ, when abused you did not threaten: show us how to forgive to the very end...
- O Christ, in your suffering you did not rebel: transfigure our refusals...
- O Christ, you see our suffering and our failures: may we walk alongside you...



Take courage, be of good heart

- O Christ, you see the distress of the exiled and abandoned: take their suffering upon yourself...
- O Christ, when lies and cares try to separate us from you: your Holy Spirit never leaves us...
- O Christ, when our heart becomes heavy: make it transparent, like a springtime that blossoms...
- O Christ, you make your servants happy: may we live in your trust...
- O Christ, our life is hidden with you in God: that is a joy that touches the depths of our soul...

Chants

Adoramus te Christe / Crucem tuam

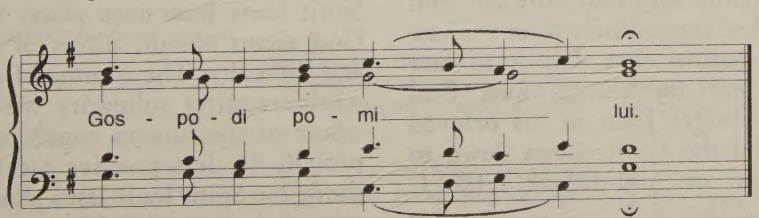
The prayer around the cross can be introduced by this prayer: O Christ, our brother, you walk alongside all who suffer on this earth. You welcome those who come to you with their burdens. In this way, as we approach the cross, we want to entrust to you, who are dead and risen, all that weighs upon us and the burdens of those who are nearby or far away–the oppressed, the persecuted, the victims of wars and violence... (the names of nations or individuals can be mentioned here).

III.

Through Christ's passover, God has opened a road on which "we have, in one Spirit, access to the Father" (Eph 2,18). Through the gift of communion with human beings of all races, cultures and languages, God gathers us like a mother gathers her children.

Chant

Oculi nostri



Seigneur, aie compassion. / Lord, have compassion. / Señor, ten compasión.
Signore, abbi compassione. / Herr, erbarme dich

Psalm

I lift my eyes to the hills: where does my hope come from?
My hope comes from the Lord who made both heaven and earth.
God will not let you stumble and fall, your guardian will not sleep.
No, the guardian of Israel never falls asleep.
The Lord is your guardian and your shield, God will stay close at hand.
The sun will not strike you by day nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all harm, guarding your soul.
God will guard you as you come and go both now and evermore.

Psalm 121

Reading

From the book of the prophet Isaiah: "Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her, all you who love her; rejoice greatly with her, all you who mourned over her. For this is what the Lord says: I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream; her children will nurse and be carried on her arms and cradled on her knees. As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem. When you see this, your heart will rejoice."

Isaiah 66.10-14
(Ezekiel 34,11-13 can also be read)

Chant

Da pacem cordium

Silence

Litany

- Lord Jesus Christ, source of all faithfulness: shed light for us on your way...
- Lord Jesus Christ, you strengthen our hearts: shed light for us on your way...
- Lord Jesus Christ, you lead your Church on the road of the Gospel: shed light for us on your way...
- Lord Jesus Christ, you reawaken in us the freshness of the Gospel: shed light for us on your way...
- Lord Jesus Christ, you wait alongside those waiting for deliverance: shed light for us on your way of freedom...
- Lord Jesus Christ, you are close to those who are helpless or homeless: shed light for us on your way of consolation...
- Lord Jesus Christ, you inspire those searching for justice and those who refuse violence: shed light for all peoples on your way of peace...
- Lord Jesus Christ, you suffer with those who are persecuted and those undergoing torture: shed light on your way of endless life...
- Lord Jesus Christ, you renew in us trust and joy: shed light for us on your way...

Prayer

Lord Christ, had we faith enough to move mountains, without living charity, what would we be? You love us. Without your Spirit alive in our hearts, what would we be? You love us. Taking everything upon yourself, you open for us a road towards faith, towards trust in God, who wants neither suffering nor human distress. Spirit of the risen Christ, Spirit of compassion, Spirit of praise, your love for each one of us will never disappear.

Prayer by Brother Roger

Chant

Laudate omnes gentes

The ALLELUIA can be sung between the verses of the Psalms, the GOSPODI between the petitions of the litanies.

You will receive power

Reflection on the theme of the Holy Spirit (continued)

At a critical moment in the life of God's people, when it no longer exists as an independent nation, the prophet Ezekiel has a vision (Ez 37,1-14). God shows him a valley filled with dry bones. When he proclaims God's word to these bones, they come together to form human bodies. Then he invokes the Spirit and the bodies come to life. The message is clear: the same God who created the world and humanity out of dust (see Gen 2.4b-7) can re-enact the miracle of creation for his worn-out people, by means of his Word and his Spirit.

At times of crisis, the prophets always tried to reawaken the nation's trust by assuring their contemporaries that beyond present difficulties, God was preparing a better future for them. And this hope was often linked to a new sending of God's Spirit into the world. Thus Isaiah speaks of an outpouring of the Spirit which will turn the desert into a garden (Isa 32,15). And the following verses (32,16-20) explain that this "new creation" will be even more far-reaching than the first: it will bring about a world of justice and peace.

Ezekiel helps us see more clearly how this will come about (36,16-28). It is not enough for God to forgive his wayward people; they need to be transformed from within. This will be the work of the Spirit, who will give them a new heart, eager and willing to follow the inspiration of God. In this context, Ezekiel takes up the prophecy of Jeremiah concerning a "new covenant" (Jer 31,31-34), a time when God's Law will be written on people's hearts. The prophet Joel, in turn, says the same thing in another way: he expects an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon "all flesh," so that everyone will be a prophet and thus know God's will.

According to other oracles, the new world order will be inaugurated by someone sent by God for this, a king like David, a prophet like Elijah, or perhaps a new Moses. Sometimes this figure is referred to as the "Messiah" or God's Anointed; it is thus clear that, to accomplish his mission, he will benefit from the Spirit's presence (Isa 11,1-9; 42,1-4; 61,1-4).

It is in the context of this expectation that the gospels take on their full meaning. First, we encounter the figure of John the Baptist. By his words and his actions, and even his garments, he resembles a prophet of a bygone age (Mark 1,4-6). He awakens great enthusiasm (1,5) and questions: "Are you the One we have been waiting for?" (cf. John 1,19-22). He answers by speaking of someone else, greater than him: "I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit" (Mark 1,8). In other words, through the one to come, people's expectations of a newtpouring of the Spirit of creation and prophecy will be fulfilled.

What a surprise, then, to see Jesus come like a humble person and ask to be baptized by John (Mark 1,9)! Here we see a fundamental theme of the Gospel: God's Anointed comes to begin the new age, but not in the way people expect. His coming is not at all spectacular, but rather discreet and "ordinary"; it begins by a gesture of solidarity with humanity far from God. And immediately there comes a confirmation that this is in fact God's way: the heavens open, God acknowledges Jesus as his beloved Son and the Spirit comes down to "remain" on him (Mark 1,10-11; John 1,32).

Of all the gospel writers, it is Saint Luke who emphasizes most strongly the presence of the Spirit in Jesus. Jesus comes "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4,14; cf. 4,1) and the first act of his ministry is to read in the synagogue of Nazareth the text of Isaiah 61 ("The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..."), applying it to himself.

How is the fullness of the Spirit's presence manifested in Jesus? First of all, by his words ("...to proclaim Good News to the poor" Luke 4,18). Mark tells us that the first thing that strikes the people is that "he taught them with authority, not like the teachers of the Law" (Mark 1,22). Mark refers here to an inner authority, given by the Spirit. Jesus' words are thus not "empty words," but are even able to vanquish the forces of evil (1,23-26). Mark presents here Jesus' teaching and his casting out of evil as part of one and the same reality (1,27).

The acts by which Jesus casts out evil spirits and heals the sick ("...sight to the blind" Luke 4,18) are likewise signs of the Spirit's presence at work within him to bring about the Kingdom of God (cf. Matt 12,28). These acts are signs of the Kingdom because they symbolize a fullness of life restored, but they are only signs. This is not the way Jesus will bring about the new world order, otherwise he would have had to cure the whole of humanity. God's Kingdom does not come about in a magical or automatic way that would eliminate the need for a personal commitment.

After Christ's baptism, we find these surprising words: "At once, the Spirit drove him into the wilderness [where he was] put to the test by the Tempter" (Mark 1,12-13). The Spirit leads Jesus into places where God seems absent, places of death and difficulty. The coming of a new world requires solidarity with the whole of the human condition, especially its less positive facets. In short, the Spirit leads Jesus along the way of the cross (cf. Heb 9,14), an inevitable road towards the blossoming of a Life stronger than death and destruction.¶

MEDITATING ON THE WORD
ANUARY

hese short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references ndicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

Ga 4.4-7 **Jn 14.26-27**
1 WED Jesus said: Peace I eave you, my own peace I give you; a peace that the world cannot give, this is my gift to you. Do not let your nearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

Jn 4.10-14 Pr 4.18-25
2 THU Above all else, watch over your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.

Jn 1.1-5 1 Jn 1.5-7
3 FRI This is what we have heard from Christ: God is light, in him there is no darkness at all.

1 Jn 1.9-2.2 **Jn 1.6-13**
4 SAT The true light that gives light to everyone came into the world.

Si 24.1-12 **Jn 1.14-18**
5 SUN The Word became flesh and lived among us. From his fullness we have all received.

Mt 2.1-12 **Is 60.1-6**
6 MON EPIPHANY Darkness covers the earth, but upon you the Lord is rising and his glory can be seen on you.

Jn 1.19-28 1 Jn 4.1-6
7 TUE John writes: You are from God, for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

Jn 1.29-34 **1 Jn 4.7-10**
8 WED God's love for us has been shown in this way: God sent his only Son into the world that we might have life through him.

1 Jn 4.11-14 **Jn 1.35-42**
9 THU Jesus asked his first disciples, What do you want? They answered, Master, where do you live? He said to them, Come, and you will see.

Jn 1.43-51 **1 Jn 4.15-18**
10 FRI There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.

Jn 3.22-30 **1 Jn 4.19-21**
11 SAT Let us love, since God loved us first. Anyone who does not love the brother they see cannot love God whom they do not see.

Is 40.1-5 **Lk 3.15-22**
12 SUN The Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.

Mk 1.12-15 1 Jn 5.1-4
13 MON Loving God means keeping his commands. And his commands are not burdensome.

Mk 1.16-20 1 Jn 5.9-13
14 TUE God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son.

Mk 1.21-28 1 Jn 5.14-15
15 WED John writes: We are confident that if we ask God for anything, and it is in accordance with his will, he will hear us.

1 Jn 5.18-20 **Mk 1.29-34**
16 THU In the evening, after sunset, people brought to Jesus the sick and the possessed. He healed them and drove out many evil spirits.

Is 42.1-7 **Mk 1.35-39**
17 FRI Jesus said to his disciples: Let us go elsewhere _ to the nearby villages _ so that I can proclaim the message there too.

Is 55.1-11 **Mk 1.40-45**
18 SAT A leper came to Jesus and said, If you are willing, you can cleanse me. Filled with compassion, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, I am willing. Be clean!

Jn 2.1-11 Is 62.1-5
19 SUN Isaiah said: For the sake of my people, I shall not keep silent. I shall not rest until her justice shines out like the breaking of day.

Mk 2.1-12 **Heb 1.1-6**
20 MON In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets in many different ways. But in our time, the last days, he has spoken to us through his Son.

Mk 2.13-17 Heb 2.5-9
21 TUE Jesus, who submitted to death, is now crowned with glory. And the gift of his life is for the benefit of us all.

Mk 2.18-22 **Heb 2.10-15**
22 WED It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should, in bringing many sons to glory, make the author of their salvation, Jesus, perfect through suffering.

Mk 3.1-6 **Heb 2.17-18**
23 THU Because Christ himself suffered when he was put to the test, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Mk 3.7-12 **Heb 3.5-8/13-14**
24 FRI Encourage each other every day, so that none of you become hardened by the deceit of sin. For we shall come to share in Christ if we hold firmly to the trust we had at first.

Mk 3.13-21 **Ac 26.16b-18**
25 SAT The Risen Christ said to Paul: I am sending you out so that people may turn from darkness to light and receive, through faith in me, forgiveness of their sins.

Ne 8.1-10 **Lk 4.14-21**
26 SUN Jesus read out these words of Isaiah the prophet: The Spirit of the Lord is on me. He has sent me to announce good news to the afflicted, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed.

Lk 22.24-30 **Tt 1.1-4**
27 MON Paul writes to Titus: God gives his faithful the hope of eternal life which he promised before the beginning of time.

Mk 4.1-9 **Heb 5.5-9**
28 TUE Jesus offered up prayer and entreaty to the one who could save him from death, he surrendered himself and he was heard.

Mk 4.13-20 Heb 7.24-28
29 WED Jesus' power to save those who come to God through him is absolute, because he lives for ever to intercede for them.

Mk 4.26-29 Heb 8.6-12
30 THU The Lord says: Among my people, no one will need to teach their neighbour, saying, Know the Lord!, for they shall all know me, from the smallest among them to the greatest.

Heb 9.11-15 **Mk 4.30-34**
31 FRI Jesus said: The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed which is the smallest of seeds, but which, once it is sown, grows into the biggest plant of all.

JOHANNINE HOURS

MARK 10. 13-16

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

In the time of Jesus, it was customary for people to ask noted religious teachers to bless their children. Here these parents ask Jesus not just for a blessing (which could remain purely formal); they want him to touch their children. It is easy to imagine the disciples' astonishment when Jesus becomes indignant at their well-meaning attempt to send these people away so that they will not disturb him. Jesus not only welcomes the children and blesses them; he goes even further, embracing them.

Jesus' indignation is a sign that the heart of the Gospel is at stake. Jesus embraces the children to make this evident. Did he do this because the children deserved it? No, Jesus says nothing about their merits. If God gives all his love to children ("the Kingdom of God belongs to them" v.14), that means that this love is offered to each one of us, unconditionally. We can therefore come to God just as we are. The only thing said about the children is that they are brought, carried to Jesus (v.13). This speaks not about their strong points, but rather about their weakness, their powerlessness.

- What helps us to realize that, in God's sight, we do not have to pretend that we are more than we are, that we can be like children before God?
- How can we become aware that, in spite of our inner contradictions, we are already "children of God"?

MEDITATING ON THE WORD
FEBRUARY

These short readings, taken from the midday prayer in Taizé, can be read several times during the day. The references indicate longer readings. If you have time to read only one, the one in bold type is suggested.

Mk 4.35-41 **Heb 9.24-28**
1 SAT Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, but into heaven itself, in order to stand for us in God's presence.

Ml 3.1-4 **Lk 2.22-40**
2 SUN PRESENTATION OF THE LORD When Simeon saw the child Jesus, he praised God and said: Now, Lord, you can let your servant depart in peace as you promised. For my eyes have seen the salvation you have prepared for all people to see.

Mk 5.25-34 **Heb 10.5-10**
3 MON We have been made holy by Jesus Christ giving his life once and for all.

Heb 10.11-18 **Mk 5.35-43**
4 TUE Jesus took the hand of the child who had died, and said: Little girl, I tell you to get up. At once she stood up and began to walk around.

Mk 6.6-13 **Heb 10.22-25**
5 WED Let us hold to the hope we profess, without wavering, for the one who has promised is faithful.

Mk 6.30-44 **Heb 10.32-38**
6 THU Remember the first days when, after having received the light of faith, you stood your ground in the face of great suffering. All your belongings were seized, and you accepted this joyfully because you knew that you had better and lasting possessions.

Heb 11.1-10 Mk 6.45-52
7 FRI When they saw Jesus walking on the water, the disciples were terrified. But at once he spoke to them saying, Have courage, it's me. Don't be afraid.

Mk 6.53-56 **Heb 11.13-16**
8 SAT Our predecessors in faith recognized that they were exiles and nomads on this earth. In this way, they showed clearly that they were in search of their real homeland. And God has prepared a city for them.

Is 6.1-8 **Lk 5.1-11**
9 SUN Jesus said to Simon Peter, Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch. Master, Simon replied, we have worked hard all night long without catching anything, but because you say so I will let down the nets.

Mk 7.31-37 **Heb 12.1-3**
10 MON Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, to run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection.

Mk 8.1-10 **Heb 12.26-28**
11 TUE We have been given possession of a kingdom that cannot be shaken. Let us then be thankful and praise God.

Mk 8.11-21 **Heb 13.1-6**
12 WED Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have welcome angels without knowing it.

Mk 8.27-30 Heb 13.7-9
13 THU Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever.

Heb 13.12-16 **Mk 8.31-33**
14 FRI Jesus taught his disciples: The Son of Man is destined to suffer grievously and to be rejected by the chief priests and scribes, to be put to death, and after three days to rise again.

Mk 8.34-35 **Heb 13.20-21**
15 SAT May the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the Shepherd of the flock, equip you with everything good for doing his will.

Jr 17.7-8 **Lk 6.17-23**
16 SUN Looking at his disciples, Jesus said: Happy are you who are poor, the kingdom of God is yours.

Mk 9.1-10 **Jm 1.1-6**
17 MON God gives to all in simplicity, without reproach.

Mk 9.14-29 **Jm 1.12-18**
18 TUE Let no one say when they are tempted, God is tempting me. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

Mk 9.30-32 **Jm 1.19-21**
19 WED Humbly accept the word planted in you, which can give you life.

Jm 1.22-27 **Mk 1.33-37**
20 THU In the morning, long before dawn, Jesus got up and went to a deserted place and there he prayed.

Mk 9.38-41 **Jm 2.1-5**
21 FRI God has chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him.

Jm 2.12-16,26 **Mk 10.13-16**
22 SAT Jesus said: Let the little children come to me; do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.

1 Co 15.45-49 **Lk 6.27-38**
23 SUN Jesus said: Be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge and you will not be judged.

Mk 10.17-22 Jm 3.13,16-18
24 MON Peacemakers sow the seeds that will bear fruit in justice.

Mk 10.23-27 **Jm 4.6-10**
25 TUE James writes: Give yourselves to God. Resist the tempter and he will flee from you; draw close to God.

Jm 5.7-9 **Mk 10.28-34**
26 WED Jesus said: No one who has left house, brothers, sisters, mother, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the Gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age, together with persecutions, and, in the age to come, eternal life.

Mk 10.35-40 **Jm 5.10-12**
27 THU For an example of patience in the face of suffering look at the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord: those who persevered are blessed. Indeed, the Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

Jm 5.13-16 **Mk 10.41-45**
28 FRI Jesus said to his disciples: You know that in the world rulers lord it over their subjects and make their power felt. This is not to happen among you. No, anyone who wants to be great among you must be your servant.

Mk 10.46-52 **Jude 20-25**
29 SAT Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.

JOHANNINE HOURS

DEUTERONOMY 8,1-18

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

What is the significance of the difficult experiences we have gone through? Reflecting on Israel's crossing of the desert on the way to the Promised Land, the Book of Deuteronomy sees such hard times as a possible source of life for the future of the nation. The book describes it as a means used by God to educate his people, like a father teaching his son what is most important in life (v.5). Through this experience, the people learned the reality of their condition before God; in the language of the Bible, they were tested, in other words, what they had in their hearts was brought to light (v.2,16).

In what does the teaching of the desert basically consist? In a word, that everything is a gift. "Human beings live...by all that comes from the mouth of God" (v.9). And the clearest sign of this is the manna, sent from heaven to nourish the people when they were unable to earn their bread. Here, the alternative appeared in all its radical clarity: either live from God's grace, or else die.

But when they enter the Promised Land, this gift and this lesson involve a challenge–to live the same way in the midst of an affluent life. How is it possible to have pilgrims' hearts in a land overflowing with good things? By a kind of inner memory: "Remember... do not forget...". This is an inexhaustible source of happiness: knowing that the same God who saved us yesterday is still at work in our lives today. It is God's faithfulness, and not "the strength of my hand" (v.17) that in the final analysis is our only hope.

- What desert experiences have I had, in other words times when the only way out was to surrender myself to God's care?
- How can we keep alive in our lives, despite our many possessions and personal successes, the conviction that God's love is at the root of everything?

A group in a parish of Austria reflected on this topic by asking themselves more specifically how their gifts could be placed at the service of communion.

Being creators with God

"I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is in you... For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but a spirit of strength and of love and of self-discipline." (2 Tim 1,6-7)

In the first place, we marvel at the gifts we discover in us and in others, the gifts around which we build ourselves up. These gifts shine out, reflecting the creative power of God, who wants the gifts he has placed in us to be brought to life, and still more, to grow, develop and bear fruit. They make life beautiful around us, even when they are little, like those of children.

When we rejoice at these gifts, we also remember that they have been given to us and that, through them, God invites us to be co-creators, to take part in an ongoing creation. When we forget the source and the reason for these gifts, we begin to use them for ourselves. Then we turn in upon ourselves and wish to be admired for ourselves. Abilities that were given to be a kind of leaven that transforms the whole loaf are in danger of becoming a means to use other people.

In the Gospel, both in the parables and in his replies to the disciples' questions, Jesus often speaks of the change of heart necessary for a new relationship to be created, for communion to be made possible. Here are some examples of these texts with a short commentary that could be used for a time of sharing in small groups.

"The greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who sits at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves." (Luke 22,26-27)

Jesus does not reproach the disciples for wishing to be great, to be recognized, to develop their gifts, but he points out the road he himself has chosen, the road that makes communion possible. Being a servant does not mean despising oneself or remaining passive, but entering into that vast reality Jesus calls the Kingdom of God, the reality of giving.

A good image of this is the multiplication of the loaves. Jesus begins by giving thanks for what is given, then he breaks the bread. To share what has been received, so that others can benefit from it, we must consent to transform it, to break it into pieces adapted to each person, as someone does who serves at table. Then Jesus gives the loaves to his disciples, who distribute them to the crowd.

The servant, like Jesus, is also someone who does not attempt to claim credit for the result of his or her gifts. Servants do not want a personal success at all costs, but accept that the results do not depend on themselves alone. They know that others are servants like them and they learn how to create with others, even if their original plans have to be changed.

Those whose gifts are more visible are often first. They see more quickly than others the needs, what is possible, and they dare to take risks, to set out before the others. Could being not first but last mean doing nothing, just waiting? The image of a guide for mountain-climbing can help us understand how the strongest can follow the pace of the weakest, agree to change the route, go more slowly so that all can arrive at the goal and deal with the difficulties that arise.

"An argument arose among the disciples as to which of them was the greatest. But Jesus, aware of their inner thoughts, took a little child and put it by his side, and said to them: Whoever welcomes this child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me; for the least among all of you is the greatest." (Luke 9,46-48)

When the disciples make comparisons and look at each other, Jesus recalls the direction in which they should look, what is greatest in the sense of what is important, worthy of consideration: the one who is least. There is a great distance between someone aware of their gifts and a child who has to discover and acquire everything. With respect to this distance, Jesus asks his disciples not to behave like "masters," but simply to welcome, to put themselves on the same level as the "least."

Accepting that everything be centred on the presence of the little ones in our midst means ensuring that our gifts will be developped in order to serve communion. What better thing can we wish for as a result of our gifts than to be able to welcome Jesus and his Father, as he himself promises? ¶

When we rejoice at our gifts, we also remember that they have been given to us and that, through them, God invites us to to take part in an ongoing creation.

listening to the continents

Zaire

Ways of building now

Zaire is currently undergoing a time of great tension. Some people from that country share their present experience:

"I am devoting my afternoons to meetings with young people and adults in our two parishes. With several animators, we have organized groups on the topic of democracy and political parties. The initiative to begin this kind of conversation was taken by ecclesial base communities that felt the need to help Christians understand the new form of government in our country.

It is not enough, as some think, to change presidents. Others on the contrary are fatalists: the country is at the bottom of the heap and will never be able to recover. It seems obvious that the economy is ailing because some keep getting richer and others keep getting poorer. But there is no point in wasting all our time discussing this and looking for scapegoats!

We are looking for ways of building now. The lesson we are drawing from this crisis is that the development of the country can in no way be the affair of a single person. Nothing can be built with a dictatorship. But democracy can only be effective in our country when the population realizes that it is responsible for the nation. That is why we are insisting on the need for mentalities to be changed.

Some animators made a proposal that a prayer of intercession be held for our country and for the national conference. We meet in the parish every Friday night for this prayer. And we pray in all the languages of the region to enable all the Christians to express easily their intentions to the Lord. We pray too for other countries that have the same difficulties as we do. We are discovering that through Christ, truth will triumph over falsehood and love over hatred."

India

Crossing the barrier of language

The youth commission of the Indian bishops' conference came to Taizé this summer, with the bishop in charge of that commission. Based on their experiences, here are some echoes representative of the life of young Christians in India:

"My region is half rural, half urban. In the past, those who took part in youth activities all came from the towns. We tried to integrate those from the countryside as well. One of the problems was that of language. In the cities we speak mostly English, in the countryside mostly Hindi.

The first thing to do to cross this barrier was for all of us to speak Hindi, our common language. Then, we visited all the villages in the area and we found youth groups. Speaking with them about what we were doing, we encouraged them and we saw that they were interested in joining us. It was a beginning of a reconciliation.

In our own parish, language is also a problem. After the prayer, when we leave church, we separate into different groups according to the region our families come from, and each group tends to stay by itself. So we have proposed that the different groups each take turns hosting a prayer. On Sunday, the place where the next Friday evening prayer will be held is announced. In this way we are beginning to get to know one another better, first the young people, but now the other generations as well."

South Africa

Reconciliation and justice

For several years now young people from South Africa, aware of the urgent need to work for reconciliation and justice in their country, have been coming to Taizé. Through them, the songs of Taizé have spread to many parishes and prayer groups. In several towns, on Friday evenings people meet for a prayer around the cross. These past few years, young people from Soweto animated the intercontinental meetings in Taizè for several months.

From Soweto: "For six weeks we made a pilgrimage of hope from church to church in the Johannesburg area. We recalled these words of Brother Roger: «Christians do not live a facile optimism but constantly seek a hope for the entire human family.» Each of us thought about the question: «How can I be a bearer of hope where I live, in my parish and in my family?» I met a young social worker who was recently in Taizé; she contacted the school where I am working, in the squatters' village."

In May, a day of reflection and prayer brought together young people at Grahamstown in the Cape.

From October 4-6, young people met in Johannesburg for a pilgrimage of trust.

"The pilgrimage led us to churches of four different denominations. The prayer around the cross was held in the Catholic church. Carrying the cross, we then left, with candles in our hands, for the Anglican church. The first day ended there. After morning prayer the following day, we shared in groups on the sources of life and on what keeps us from responding to God. We thought about the reasons for our fear. Midprayer was held in a Presbyterian church and still another church welcomed us for a celebration of the resurrection that was at the heart of the evening prayer."

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